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ABSTRACT

Ohio's Occupational Work Adjustment (OWA) program is a one- to two-year ungraded vocational program for fourteen- and fifteen-year-olds who have been identified as potential dropouts from the regular educational program. Begun on a pilot basis in 1967, OWA served over 80,000 students in 499 programs during the 1981-82 school year. The goal of OWA, which finds its legal basis in the U.S. Department of Labor's Work Experience and Career Exploration Program, is to reorient these students toward successful completion of a vocational or academic high school program. Students staying in school in order to participate in the program are assisted in finding job placements in the school or in the community, working during two consecutive class periods each school day and up to 23 hours each week. Students in the program have special classes together dealing with job and social skills and with mathematics and language arts, as well as taking classes in the regular school curriculum. Certified teachers with specialized training act as program coordinators, diagnosing the students' academic needs, developing appropriate individual educational plans, and leading career exploration activities. This report also includes a review of the literature on the dropout problem. (Author/PGD)

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KEEPING HIGH RISK STUDENTS IN SCHOOL

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This presentation is based on the assumption that there is value in keeping high risk or disadvantaged students in school until they are graduated. However, it is easier to encourage students who are trouble-makers, who do not come to school and obviously dislike it, to drop out.

Besides the democratic principle of providing an equal educational opportunity for every citizen regardless of race or socioeconomic level, there are very tangible dollars and cents reasons for keeping students in school.

The school benefits by compensatory programs. In 1980, for example, the U.S. Justice Department's office of juvenile justice and delinquency prevention awarded $8 million for programs aimed at curbing the dropout problem and preventing delinquency (Mouat, 1980). State aid to education computed on the basis of average daily attendance is increased as the student attendance rate is increased (Neill, 1979). Costs for lost tax revenues from high school dropouts aged 25-34 is $71 billion (cited in Neill, 1979). School tax monies based on assessed property value are higher in better neighborhoods and in areas of successful, productive industry. With school vandalism rampant, monies spent for labor, repair, replacement, restoration and increased insurance costs are escalating.

For the individual there are important economic implications. Retaining students in school has an effect on the number of jobs available in the community. It has an effect on adult and youth employment, as well as unemployment (Bienstock, 1970). When there are unemployed youths seeking employment, they are competing with unemployed adults for a limited number

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of positions, frequently of an unskilled or semi-skilled nature. The greater the number of unemployed youths and adults competing for the same, limited number of jobs available, the higher the rate of unemployment. Furthermore, due to technology, the number of unskilled and semi-skilled jobs in proportion to those of a highly skilled nature has diminished considerably. Thus, young people entering the job market at a low level have fewer prospects for advancement than did unskilled laborers in the past (Havighurst and Levine, 1979). Unemployed adults are more likely to obtain jobs because of their previous work experience. When unemployment is high, the greatest hardships are suffered by those who have voluntarily withdrawn from school. Although the unemployment rate is 8.9% for all workers, the youth unemployment rate is 21.7% (Sullivan, 1982). The unemployment problem is further complicated for those under twenty-one, especially in large cities. A particular concern is that those under twenty-one who remain unemployed for too long will become unemployable (Schreiber, 1970).

Education implies trainability. In consequence, industry is hesitant to hire anyone untrainable or unworthy of promotion (Schreiber, 1970).

Individuals who drop out of school do so at a cost to themselves in terms of lower lifetime earnings (Neill, 1979). Their social mobility is reduced (Havighurst and Levine, 1979). Furthermore, their eligibility for welfare increases (Bennett, 1966). Thus, by concentrating on keeping students in school, the community profits by lower welfare costs, fewer institutional and rehabilitative services, and increased earnings and citizen productivity (Kaplan, 1966). Are you aware that youths under seventeen now commit over half of all serious crimes in the United States (Time, 1977)? Incarceration and rehabilitation cost many times the average amount of dollars spent per student on public education.

Perhaps the greatest cost to society is in terms of the individual: the failure to educate each person results in a waste of our greatest resource, the human resource (Kohler and Fontaine, 1962).

Who are the high risk students, the potential dropouts? The most universal characteristic is low socioeconomic level (Amos, 1966). Not only do poverty and lack of education go hand in hand, but correlations exist between low socioeconomic level and educational success (Sexton, 1961). For females, the greatest reason for dropping out is pregnancy (Neill, 1979). Eight out of ten mothers under age seventeen and nine out of ten mothers under age fifteen never finish high school, and four out of ten mothers under age fifteen never go to school beyond the 8th grade. Although schools no longer exclude or expel pregnant students, a high school diploma is beyond the reach of the majority of pregnant students, and the number of child-mothers ten to fourteen years of age is climbing.

Minority youth are especially dropout-prone: whereas one out of seven white youths 16-24 was not enrolled in school who was also not a high school graduate, one out of five black youths and one out of three Hispanic youths of the same age had dropped out of high school prior to graduation (Neill, 1979). Urban, inner-city dwellers are especially dropout-prone (Feck, 1971), and non-English speakers usually terminate their school careers.

An important signal of the potential dropout is extensive and numerous absences, truancy, tardiness and skipping class or classes. In general, these students' attendance declines in seventh grade, and is lowest in senior high school and kindergarten (Neill, 1979).

School mobility is negatively correlated with academic stability, and disavantaged and potential dropouts have a high mobility, especially in their own neighborhoods (Justman, 1967; Conant, 1961).

Potential dropouts are usually the children of dropouts and have other siblings who have dropped out (Mink and Kaplan, 1970; Neill, 1979). In homes where the father is present and employed, he has a low occupational level (Meacham and Mink, 1970). Students from broken homes are twice as likely to drop out early as are students living with both parents (Neill, 1979), and this may be linked with a lowered socio-economic status.

By high school potential dropouts are usually two years behind grade level in reading (Mink and Kaplan, 1970). Since reading retardation often leads to grade retention, potential dropouts are older than their classmates and behind their peers (Neill, 1979).

Mental retardation or lack of genetically determined potential is considered a very reliable measure of the probability that a pupil will not finish high school (Meacham and Mink, 1970).

There are also other factors contributing to dropping out:

1. Peers influence dropping out or graduating (Havighurst and Levine, 1979).

2. Low self-concept and aspirations (Beane, Lipka and Ludewig, 1980). Students describe themselves in increasingly deprecating terms the longer they have been in school.

3. Their basic needs are unmet, thus they concentrate on short-term goals and meeting immediate needs: food, clothing, shelter (Davis, 1946).

4. They have no long-term goals, and education is a deferred value (Riessman, 1962).

5. They exhibit language deficiencies in a language-oriented institution (Deutsch, 1967; Bernstein, 1967).

6. They react physically and are reacted to physically, as opposed to verbally (Bernstein, 1967). They learn by doing, as opposed to learning by abstract reasoning. Their parents think of education as practical and useful and do not ascribe to the concept of education for education's sake (Riessman, 1962).

7. Another variable contributing to dropping out is suspension, expulsion or exclusion from school. There is a strong correlation between dropping out and suspension from school, especially for black students (Neill, 1979; Meacham and Mink, 1970).

8. Busing to achieve desegregation has had an indirect influence on the dropout rate. The exodus of white and middle class students to private schools is affecting the attendance and dropout rates of those remaining in the public schools (Neill, 1979).

9. Schools with custodial, as opposed to humanistic, climates also influence the dropout rate (Beane, Lipka and Ludewig, 1980).

It is suggested that dropouts prefer work to school (Young, 1966), and surveys conducted on a state-wide basis in Rhode Island suggest that there are two main reasons for dropping out: the decision to go to work and lack of interest in school. In New York school dropouts said they did not like some teachers, a particular course, or authority and school rules (Neill, 1979). They suggested they would not drop out if there were more alternatives, job-oriented courses and individualized instruction (Hunt and Woods, 1979).

One program which combines job experience, career exploration and individualized instruction and is aimed at reorienting students who are disenchanted with school before they reach the dropout age is the Occupational Work Adjustment or OWA program in Ohio. It finds its legal basis in the Work Experience and Career Exploration Program or WECEP sponsored by the U.S. Department of Labor. WECEP permits 14- and 15-year-old students to work during the hours school is in session. The WECEP criteria are incorporated within Ohio's OWA program standards.

Occupational Work Adjustment or OWA started as a pilot in 1967 with one program and fifteen students and was launched in the 1969-70 school year with 36 programs. This year there are 499 programs, and OWA has served over 80,000 students. In a state where unemployment is one of the highest in the nation, providing on-the-job experience while students are working toward graduation is far-sighted.

In Ohio the program is funded with state vocational funds as opposed to federal funds for the disadvantaged, although funds from the federal government for the disadvantaged are channelled to OWA. However, Ohio uses vocational funds with OWA since there is skill training involved.

You may be wondering how inexperienced students can work in places where unemployment is already high and rising daily. In training programs such as OWA, it is not necessary to pay the minimum wage, although many private employers of OWA students do pay them the same as anyone else. Furthermore, the students are limited to two class periods per day in school to work, not to exceed three hours on a school day and 23 hours a week during weeks when school is in session. WECEP criteria prohibit employment of a minor if it has the effect of displacing a worker employed in the establishment of the employer.

Many OWA coordinators, those in charge of programs in the school, use school jobs such as library aide, teacher aide, kitchen crew or custodian as a first job placement. Some coordinators place students who have demonstrated good work habits such as punctuality, attendance, good working relationships, cooperation, positive attitude, and so on, to move students to jobs in the private sector. Fast food chains are especially receptive to younger, unskilled youths. One successful OWA program produced and marketed its own product, similar to the Junior Achievement program. These students were paid benefits depending on the sales of their product. When students work in the school, the school board pays a training wage.

Private employers are receptive to the employment of these students since it affords positive public relations in the community. There are other reasons, too, such as lower wages and a good resource for recruiting full-time, well-trained and experienced employees when the students are old enough.

In Ohio, OWA is a one- or two-year ungraded vocational program designed for 14- and 15-year-old students identified as potential dropouts. Enrollment for a second year in OWA is <u>not</u> a goal of the program, however, and only 9% of the 8500 students in 1980-81 enrolled in the program for the second year. The goal is to return students who have become disinterested in school to the mainstream so that they will graduate. The job experience provided by OWA serves as an

incentive to attract these students to school. Once there, the students have special classes together, as well as other classes in the regular academic program. The students' academic needs are diagnosed by the OWA coordinator who provides an appropriate educational plan for each student, as well as job entry level skills, career exploration activities and social survival techniques. Each OWA student has a minimum of two consecutive 45- minute periods devoted to OWA-related instruction with emphasis on math and language arts; 90 minutes minimum per day to work; and at least two required general subjects taught by teachers other than the OWA coordinator. The program can exist at the middle school or junior high and/or high school levels and is limited to a minimum of fifteen and a maximum of thirty students per coordinator. The students are divided into two groups and one section meets with the coordinator for the OWA academic class while the students in the other section are on the job or in another class. The group then meets as a whole for the OWA-related course which covers such topics as finding and holding a job, job safety, interviewing, filling out job applications, filing for a social security number, labor laws, job adjustment topics, grooming and hygiene, personal and social behavior, family life, use of leisure time, money management, and smoking, alcohol and drug use and abuse. The second section meets immediately following the careers class for their OWA academic class. The limited numbers of students in the program and the further division in halves permits the coordinator to talk and counsel students on an individual or small group basis. Obviously, counseling is a vital element in the program.

The OWA coordinator is a certified teacher who has specialized training in education, special education, practical arts or guidance. This person has a minimum of two years' successful teaching experience and has been employed for a minimum of twelve months in one or more occupations outside public education.

Most of all, the OWA coordinator is a person with a sincere interest, desire and capability to work with dropout-prone youth. In Ohio new OWA coordinators receive special training at a week-long workshop during the summer and in regional seminars throughout the year for two years. Certified OWA coordinators attend an annual 3-day conference. Technical workshops are available to any OWA coordinator interested in participating in an intensified two-week experience dealing with such topics as remedial reading, career exploration, values clarification, audiovisual preparation and community services.

Obviously, the most critical element in the success of the program is the OWA coordinator. Besides teaching, the coordinator identifies suitable work or job stations in school and/or in the private sector. Communication with the employer or job supervisor must be on-going. The coordinator must arrange the student's job activities with the job sponsor and keep informed of the student's progress on the job. Records and reports must be maintained, including the training agreement signed by the coordinator, employer, student and parents. Contact and communication with parents is vital, and their involvement and commitment are essential to the program's success. Consequently, the OWA coordinator makes a minimum of two home visits per student during the year. Furthermore, parents, employers, school administrators and counselors are selected to serve on an Advisory Council for local program considerations. The coordinator must also keep in contact with the OWA student's other academic teachers in order to stay aware of problems and try to find solutions or to offer praise. Coordinators are also responsible for presenting a positive image of the program to the community, as well as to other staff members in their schools. In order to accomplish all these tasks, the coordinator has two consecutive periods for coordination. During this time visits to job stations or students' homes can be made, counseling can be done, or programs can be planned. Needless to say, supportive administrators are

also essential for program success.

Some coordinators extend the knowledge gained in the classroom by the use of field trips to industries, job sites and vocational and technical schools. Many coordinators plan trips out to breakfast or go to the zoo or circus with their students. Some coordinators involve their students in organized sports activities such as bowling and baseball or basketball. They acquaint their students with a variety of leisure time activities such as skating or skiing or hiking. OWA Youth Clubs provide disadvantaged students an opportunity to join in extracurricular or co-curricular activities. In the clubs the students learn democratic process and become involved in community and school activities. Some clubs purchase t-shirts or jackets with "OWA Youth Club" on them, and the students are proud to be recognized as an active member of a group which is socially approved--something new to so many.

A special provision in the Ohio program is the Student Awards Program. This is a series of academic activities to help the student improve his or her self-image, develop vocational choices and understand employment in general. There are five areas of concentration for the Youth Awards. Each unit provides the student with twenty or more suggested activities. The OWA coordinator may substitute activities where appropriate in all five of these curriculum areas. The Awards may be completed both in and outside the related classrooms. Activities can and should be tailored to meet the individual needs of the students.

Three or four examples for each area of concentration are included for purposes of explanation (Pinchak, 1980). In the area of career exploration are activities related to learning about different career fields and their related occupations. Activities include planning, interviewing, researching, creating, organizing and developing skills necessary in career education.

1. Choose a career field in which you would like to work. Explore the major responsibilities of your selected career field and report your findings to your OWA coordinator.

2. Interview at least two people working in a career field of your choice. Make a list of five things they dislike about their jobs.

3. Make a bulletin board describing a career field of your choice and the opportunities in that field.

4. Construct a chart showing the educational and/or skill requirements necessary to enter and advance in a career field of interest to you.

In the area of communications are activities to improve communication skills through writing, speaking, reading, constructing displays, and reporting to the class.

1. Interview a public employee about his or her job and report your findings to the class.

2. Plan a field trip to one of your local government services (police, fire station, etc.) for your OWA class and submit the plan to your coordinator.

3. Organize a field trip for your OWA class to a local radio, TV, or newspaper.

4. List the information you would include in a report to the police about a stolen car. Role-play calling the police.

Work adjustment activities include those involved in developing necessary skills to identify, obtain and maintain a job.

1. Make a list of ten working conditions you would like to find on your next job.

2. Interview two local employers as to what they look for in hiring new employees. Report the results to your class.

3. Collect job application forms from three local businesses. Complete them and turn them in to your coordinator.

4. Make a display showing people with proper work appearance and dress for different types of jobs.

Personal growth activities are designed to help students understand themselves and others in coping with everyday living. These activities can include social skills and habits, positive self-image, personal management skills and practical knowledge of law.

1. Create a display or a bulletin board on "How to Get Along with People."

2. List five advantages and five disadvantages of buying a new car. List five advantages and five disadvantages of buying a used car.

3. Make a list of eight television shows that you think are suitable for children under 12 years of age. They can be shows during the evening, during the day or Saturday mornings. Give five reasons why you think each show is suitable for children.

4. Make a list of eight television shows that are definitely not for children under 12 years of age. Give five reasons for each show.

5. Make a poster showing ways to prevent accidents in the home.

In the area of service and citizenship are activities related to awareness and involvement for improvement of community, environment and society. These activities may include services to the community, school, environment, service organizations and charity.

1. Interview a member of a local service club as to the club's activities and objectives and report the results to the class.

2. Construct a poster dealing with a pollution problem in your community.

3. Collect at least ten pairs of used prescription eye glasses to donate to the local Lion's club.

4. Clean and maintain a part of the school lawn for a specified length of time.

5. Volunteer to work with an elementary teacher for at least five times during study hall or after school helping that teacher tutor students, grade papers or assist in any way.

In return for committing themselves to accomplishing a certain number of objectives, they are awarded certificates and plaques and state recognition offered by the State Department of Education.

The OWA program is evaluated according to the criteria for other vocational programs in Ohio: the Program Review for Improvement, Development and Expansion in Vocational Education, or PRIDE. Every OWA program in Ohio is evaluated by the PRIDE procedure once every five years, although year-end reports are required annually. The PRIDE evaluation is directed at five areas: curriculum and instruction; facilities and equipment; instructional staff; students; and product review.

In the area of curriculum and instruction there must be such elements as a curriculum outline, course of study, remedial work, occupational objectives, individual and group guidance, and student records.

The facilities and equipment area covers the classroom, a flexible seating arrangement, audiovisual equipment, storage, OWA office, and transportation for field trips.

The professional qualifications and personal competencies of the OWA coordinator are covered in the area of the instructional staff. The OWA coordinator must have a college degree with formal training in counseling, vocational guidance, human growth and development, testing, psychology, sociology, and remediation. The coordinator must show evidence of professional advancement, relate well with students, serve as a model, counsel students, and act as an advisor to a functioning youth organization.

That the student entering the OWA program should be able to benefit from the program is the guiding statement in the area of the students. Students enrolled in the program must meet the criteria for acceptance into the program: age, potential dropout, poor attendance, low academic achievement, and so on. The OWA student's parents must have been visited and given their consent for the child to participate in the program.

Finally, the product review is the examination of students after they have completed or left the instructional program. After the individual school has reviewed its program, state level teams review the program using the local report as an aid.

How are students identified for the OWA program? Age is a necessary criterion since it is a legal requirement. A student must be at least 14 and not yet 16 when he or she enrolls in OWA. Irregular school attendance is another of the strongest criteria used by coordinators to identify students for the program. Other selection criteria include: performance consistently below potential, poor self-image, behavior problems requiring discipline, and test scores which indicate the student is two years behind grade level in reading or arithmetic (Glaser, 1981).

Who identifies students for the program? The coordinators feel they are the most important people who determine final student selection. Other people whose influence is considered to be very important are counselors, administrators, classroom teachers, and the student by his or her own request (Glaser, 1981).

What are the three most important goals of the program according to the OWA coordinators? They are successful completion of a vocational or academic high school program, regular attendance and attitudinal development. While the first is a long-range goal, the other two are goals which can be perceived immediately by the coordinator and have an effect on the goal of graduation (Glaser, 1981).

How successful is Ohio's program? Because of such problems as high student mobility, a completely accurate assessment is impossible. However, unofficial reports suggest that the OWA program is at least more than 50% successful in terms of high school graduation, as opposed to only 10% without the program. To more than 80,000 students, Ohio has provided pre-job experience such as interviewing, filling out applications, filing for a social security number and labor laws; beginning job experience; and knowledge of the responsibilities a worker has once he or she has a job.

How can you implement such a program in your state? Twenty-four states have approval to use WECEP in their state. If you find that yours has not been approved, your State Educational Agency files a letter of application for approval of a State program with the Administrator of the Wage and Hour Division. This program may not interfere with schooling or with the health and well-being of the minors involved and may not constitute oppressive child labor. The application must include information concerning: eligibility, credits, size, instructional schedule, teacher-coordinator, written training agreement and other provisions. The Administrator of the Wage and Hour Division approves the application or gives prompt reasons for denial. Every two years a new application for approval of the WECEP program must be filed.

How can you implement such a program in your school if WECEP has been approved for your state? In Ohio, such a program is available to schools that operate at least one approved vocational unit for each 300 students enrolled in 10-12 or that offer a significant program of vocational education within the school system and recognize the need to serve the socio-economically handicapped student. Schools considering the program should have in operation a well-planned program of guidance and testing as a means of more effectively identifying students who can benefit from the program. There must be vocational programs available for the students upon completion of the OWA program in keeping with their interests and abilities.

In Ohio, the total program is sponsored by the State Department of Education, Division of Vocational Education. Units of OWA programs are approved and administered by the Vocational Distributive Education Services and recommended to the State Board of Education for approval.

In times of reduced federal and state aid and local budget cut backs, it takes the insight and commitment on the part of superintendents, secondary administrators and school districts to provide appropriate programs for potential dropouts. Such commitments require the conviction that the long-term advantages are worth the expense.

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